



Tuvya T. Amsel*
Tel Aviv
Israel

Is what we wear, is who we are?

То, что мы носим, то, кто мы есть?

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The English idiom “**don’t judge a book by its cover**” (or “*You can’t judge a book by its cover*”) is one of the basic lessons we were all taught. Yet, one of the most common influencer on us is the other person attire i.e. “cover”. As shallow as it sounds and as stupid as it is what we wear as professionals impacts the other. Although there is no research to support the influence of polygraph examiner attire on the examinee we can deduce and learn the lesson from other professions.

Jennings et al (2016) [1] research examined the influence of the orthopedic surgery physician attire on outpatients. 85 patients completed a three-part questionnaire in the outpatient orthopedic clinic at an urban teaching hospital. In the first section, participants viewed eight images, four of a male surgeon and four of a female surgeon wearing a white coat over formal attire, scrubs, business attire, and casual attire, and rated each image on a five-level Likert scale. Participants were asked how confident, trustworthy, safe, caring, and smart the surgeon appeared, how well the surgery would go, and how willing they would be to discuss personal information with the pictured surgeon. The

* ta@amsel.co.il

participant ranked all images from most to least confident in the second part and the last section obtained demographic information from the patients.

The white coat on the male surgeon elicited modestly higher ratings in confidence, intelligence, surgical skill, trust, ability to discuss confidential information, caring, and safety compared with business attire. Similarly, the white coat was preferred to casual attire in all categories. For the female surgeon, white coat and scrubs were not different, however the white coat was preferred to business attire in four of seven categories. Casual clothing was widely disliked in all categories for surgeons (men and women). When attire was compared for confidence on a scale, the white coat ranked higher than business and casual attire, but not scrubs. Overall, modest preferences were observed for the white coat in terms of confidence, intelligence, trust, and safety. Furthermore patients are more willing to discuss personal information and believe that their surgery will go better if the surgeon wears a white coat or scrubs.

Petrilli et. Al (2018) [2] research sampled 4063 patient who answered a questionnaire across 10 academic hospitals in the USA. The questionnaire included photographs of a male and female physician dressed in seven different forms of attire. Patients were asked to rate the provider pictured in various clinical settings. Preference for attire was calculated as the composite of responses across five domains (knowledgeable, trustworthy, caring, approachable and comfortable). Secondary outcome measures included variation in preferences by respondent characteristics (e.g., gender), context of care (e.g., inpatient vs outpatient) and geographical region. 53% indicated that physician attire was important to them during care. Over one-third agreed that it influenced their satisfaction with care. Compared with all other forms of attire, formal attire with a white coat was most highly rated. Important differences in preferences for attire by clinical context and respondent characteristics were noted. For example, respondents ≥ 65 years preferred formal attire with white coats while scrubs were most preferred for surgeons.

But the influence of attire goes beyond medical doctors. Using a sample of 201 participants Furnham et. Al (2014) [3] examined how the participants perceived professionalism of male and female dentists and lawyers in various attires. Results showed an absolute preference for male dentists and lawyers in professional and formal attire, respectively. Male dentists and lawyers in professional and formal attire were further rated as more suitable, capable, easier to talk to, and friendlier than female professionals, and those dressed in smart or casual attire.

Also universities are perceived as a liberal, free spirit and an informal location in where young students are dressed in casual clothing Carr et. al (2010) [4] research pictures a different reality: 454 undergraduate business students and 192 undergraduate non-

business students participated in the study. The genders of the students were fairly evenly split between female and male. About 72% of the business student respondents were 21 years old or younger as compared to 79% for the non-business students. The results presented in this paper suggest that both business and non-business students had a higher opinion of their educational experience including the reputation of the institution, the value of their education, and the quality of their education when the model instructor was dressed in professional attire versus casual or business casual attire. In addition, both business and non-business students had a more positive perception of their preparedness for finding a job and ability to land a job when the model instructor was dressed in professional attire versus casual or business casual attire. The results suggest that there is no significant difference between perceptions of business majors and non-business majors concerning the impact of faculty attire on the educational experience and the marketability of the student upon graduation.

Attire and the polygraph

Also there is no research examining the impact of the examiner attire on the examinee, a practice used once may suggest it. Among the many ethnical and immigrant groups that live in Israel some live or come from areas or cultures that are less exposed to the modern world (like the Amish people in the USA). One day a respected clergyman from a small ethnical group who had a grey a long beard (a beard representing religious symbol and above all dignity) walk in to take a polygraph test. He looked at the polygraph instrument that was an old analogic instrument, turned to the examiner and ask him: "Are you going to believe to this tin box rather than my beard?". This expression of disbelief in "tin boxe" led the idea of examiners' dressed in white coats and carrying a stethoscope thus having a façade of medical doctors a profession that represent the knowledge of the human body i.e. the examinee's body that will display her/his lies. As a result of this practice the amount of false negatives and inconclusive decreased.

Does this mean that examiners should wear white coats? The answer depend on the examiner's organization and the examinees' type. But regardless of the white coat no doubt that professional attire is a MUST and casual attire is OUT.

But professional attire is only one element of the equation; the examination room is the other. A dirty, messy, broken furniture, and non-private examination room is as damaging as a poorly dressed examiner. A professionally dressed examiner cannot compensate for a nonprofessional examination room.

Conclusion

Next time when you stand in front of your wardrobe considering what to wear keep these studies in mind, seems like professional and formal attire will have a better impact on your examinees than the casual attire.

And the answer to the opening question “Is what we wear is who we are?“, is “YES” at least in the eyes of our examinees. Our professional attire serves as a nonverbal clue and so the more professional we appear the more we are trusted. And trust reduces the innocent’s fear of error and increase the guilty examinee fear of detection thus eliminating her/his hope of error.

References

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